

## Minimum and Optimal School District-Specific Average Class Size Model Policy

It is the intent of the Board to comply with Sections 15 and 16 of Act 153 of 2010<sup>1</sup> requiring superintendents to work with school boards to develop policy guidelines for minimum and optimal average class sizes in regular and technical education classes. Class size guidelines will be used to inform annual decisions related to staffing and program offerings.

### Implementation

1. The superintendent or his or her designee shall, in consultation with building principals, develop supervisory union-wide class minimum and optimum average class size guidelines that take into account the instructional needs of specific elementary grade intervals and required and elective courses at the secondary level.
2. Class size guidelines in the supervisory union may vary as necessary to reflect differences among school districts due to geography and other factors, such as school size and programmatic needs.
3. The guidelines shall also ensure compliance with state or federal requirements.
4. The superintendent shall report to the Board at least annually on the implementation of this policy, and shall include in his or her report information related to the use of the guidelines in determining actual class sizes and program offerings in the schools within the supervisory union.
5. The Vermont Department of Education's *Class Size Policy Guidelines* shall be considered in developing class size guidelines.
6. This policy shall be posted on the supervisory union's Web site and forwarded to the Commissioner of Education by January 15, 2011.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 15 Act 153 of 2010 requires superintendents to "work with the school boards of the member districts to develop and implement policies regarding minimum and optimal average class sizes for regular and technical education classes. The policies may be supervisory union-wide, may be course or grade specific, and may reflect differences among school districts due to geography and other factors." 16 V.S.A. § 242(5).

<sup>2</sup> Section 16 of Act 153 of 2010 requires that, by January 15, 2011, each supervisory union and member district board; 1) adopt minimum and optimal average class size policies, 2) post the policy on the supervisory union website, and 3) forward the policy to the Commissioner of Education.

## **School District-Specific Class Size Policy Guidelines**

In order to provide quality instruction and consistency across all grade levels, the following Standards will be considered in developing class size guidelines.

### ***Technical Education Class Size Differentials***

Career and Technical Education (CTE) class size is primarily driven by factors related to course expectations, safety considerations, and space constraints. These factors, which drive maximum class size, may also impact minimum class size decisions, and must be evaluated in the context of guidelines specific to the course and equipment under consideration.

### ***Grade-Specific Considerations***

Research indicates that best practices regarding minimum and optimal class sizes vary to some degree by grade level. See the attached chart for recommendations.

### ***Course-Specific Considerations***

The following are space-related factors that should be considered when fashioning class size policies:

1. Laboratory space requires adequate room for both group work and individual work, and must support the prescribed program of studies;
2. Kindergarten classrooms usually include discrete areas for gross-motor physical activity and for activity with learning materials. Research indicates that a minimum of 50 square feet per student is desirable;
3. Art classrooms also require somewhat greater than normal per-student space, and also have to accommodate adequate ventilation. Research indicates that a minimum of 50 square feet per student is desirable; and
4. Science laboratories require learning stations outfitted with gas, water and electricity, and must afford students significant space for movement, and for proper safety precautions, during laboratory investigations. Research again indicates that a minimum of 50 square feet per student is desirable.

### ***Multi-Grade Classrooms***

Multi-grade classes are covered by these policies in the same manner as single grade classrooms.

### ***Special Education***

Federal law requires that each special education student receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). For this reason, *self-contained* special education classes should be excluded from the average minimum and optimal class size calculations.

### ***Physical Education***

Physical education class sizes must be designed with the unique pedagogical, equipment-related and space-related needs of that discipline in mind. This approach is indispensable to the effective delivery of the learning standards of this content area, and to the effective assessment of the degree of success of their delivery. Adaptive physical education classes are excluded from the average minimum and optimal class size calculations.

### ***English Language Learners (ELL)***

Incorporation of ELL students into minimum and optimal average class sizes is inherently difficult. As with students on IEPs and 504 Plans, this is partly because of the small numbers of such students, and the inherently individualized nature of their educational programs. Strategies designed to immerse ELL students with their English-speaking peers, and the emerging emphasis on co-teaching practices, lend themselves to achieving desirable minimum and optimal average class sizes. Because of the unique characteristics of English language learners, they should generally be excluded from the average minimum and optimal class size calculations if they are in a self-contained classroom.

### ***Distance Learning Classes***

The 2010 legislative session expanded the availability of distance learning for Vermont students, and it is expected that this trend will continue in legislative sessions to come. Distance learning affords students access to courses that would otherwise be unavailable, either due to the lack of locally qualified teachers, or due to the cost of teaching. It is recommended that for purposes of calculating minimum and optimal average class sizes, the total number of students and teachers at all sites be considered in the calculation.

### ***Existing State Board Rules Regarding Maximum Class Sizes***

Relevant to the issue of *minimum* and *optimal* class sizes is the manner in which the State Board of Education constrains *maximum* class sizes. Portions of SBE Rule 2120.8.2 are as follows:

#### **2120.8.2 Staff**

- (b) At the elementary level, classes in grades K-3, when taken together, shall average fewer than 20 students per teacher. In grades 4-8, when taken together, classes shall average fewer than 25 students per teacher.
  
- (c) At the secondary level, the total class rolls of an English language arts teacher shall not exceed 100 students. In other disciplines, class rolls shall not average more than 150 students per teacher, except where the specific nature of the teacher's assignment, such as in certain art, music, or physical education programs, is plainly adaptable to the teaching of greater numbers of students while meeting the educational goals of the program.
  
- (e) Each school shall employ sufficient and qualified special education staff as are needed to identify students eligible for special education services and to implement each eligible student's Individual Education Plan and Section 504 plan.

# **Chart Illustrating School District-Specific Class Size Policy Guidelines**

This chart is adapted from an existing set of policies in place in a particular Vermont supervisory union.

<b>School District-Specific Model Class Size Chart (Minimum and Optimal)</b>			
<b>Grade Cluster</b>	<b>Instructional Area</b>	<b>Minimum Average per Grade Cluster</b>	<b>Optimal Average Range per Grade Cluster</b>
K-2	All	14	14-18
3-4	All	14	14-18
5-6	All	14	14-20
7-8	All (except PE)	14	14-22
7-8	PE	14	14-22
<b>Grade Cluster</b>	<b>Instructional Area</b>	<b>Minimum Average per Course/Content Area</b>	<b>Optimal Average per Course/Content Area</b>
9-12	PE	20	20-25
9-12	Music	18	18-22
9-12	General/Other	18 <sup>2</sup>	18-22
9-12	“Singleton” Courses	14 <sup>2</sup>	14-22